



Fellini: Changing the Subject

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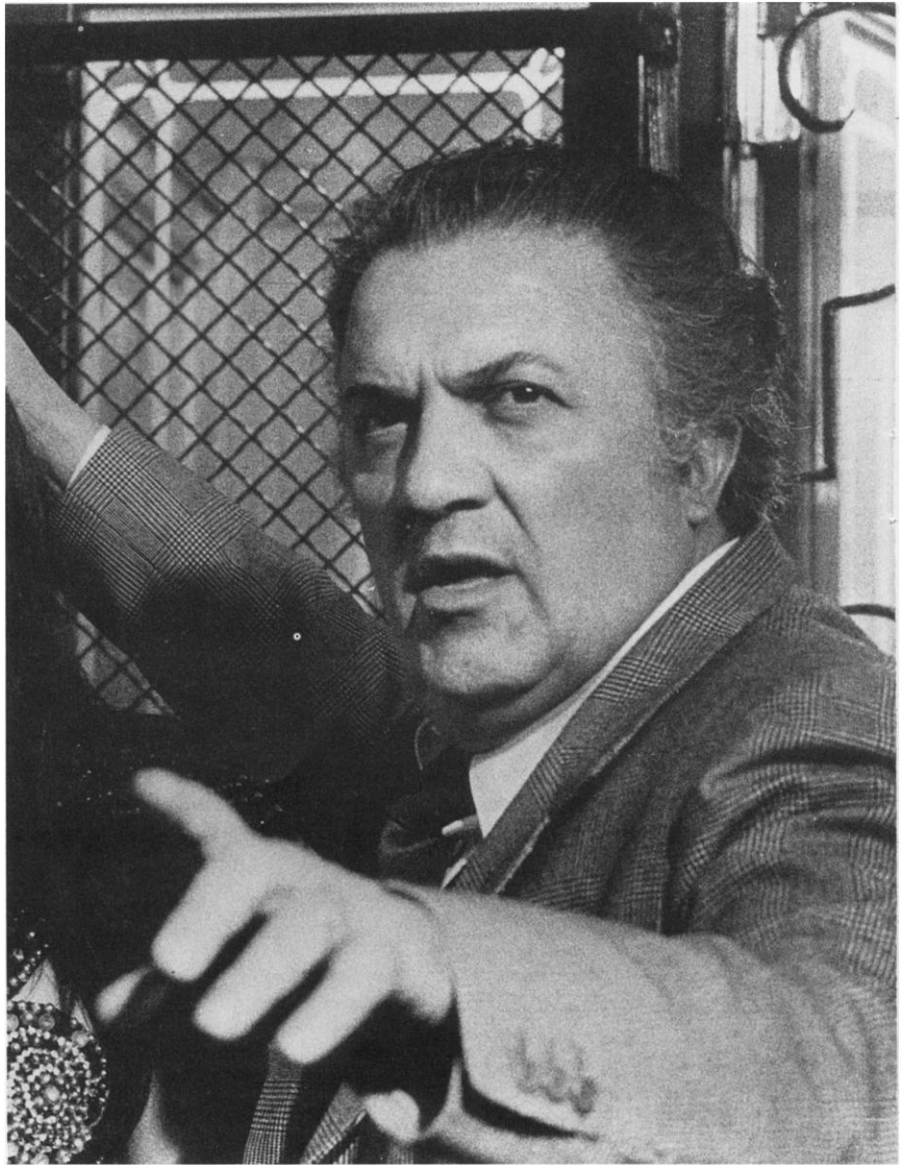
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We should suspend the typical questions: how does a free subject penetrate the density of things and endow them with meaning. . . . Rather we should ask: under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what functions does it exhibit . . . ? In short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse.

—MICHEL FOUCAULT (118)

The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his book . . . in the same relation of antecedence as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not subject with the book as predicate. . . .

—ROLAND BARTHES (145)



Fellini: Entirely positioned within and produced by the multiple discourses that are “Roma.”

Frank Burke

Fellini: Changing the Subject

The career of Federico Fellini offers remarkable parallels to the recent history of individualism and the subject, especially in the domain of film theory. Particularly evident is the concurrence of Fellini’s reputation and the fate of *auteurism*: 1954 was the year of *La Strada* and of Truffaut’s promulgation of a *politique des auteurs*; 1959 saw the shooting of *La Dolce Vita* and the emergence of the French New Wave; 1962–63 brought *8 1/2* and Andrew Sarris’s influential “Notes on the Auteur Theory.”

Without question, Fellini’s reputation benefited by an *auteurist* moment which valorized the film director as artist, gave strong impetus to the European art film movement, and, in so doing, aligned itself with the tradition of high modernism in the arts—privileging the uniqueness of artistic self-expression as an oppositional force in the face of industrialized society.

To some extent, that reputation was sustained through the sixties by proliferating *auteurism* (Sarris’s book *American Film Directors* appeared in

1968), high modernism, and perhaps most important, the romantic individualism of the decade, which dovetailed with the media image of Fellini as a maverick and genius.

However, despite Fellini's continued visibility, his critical reputation peaked with *8 1/2*, especially among academic theorists. From the mid-sixties on, that reputation has suffered virtually uninterrupted decline. Robert Phillip Kolker is representative when he writes in the early eighties that "*8 1/2* . . . marks the end of [Fellini's] creative period. . . . In his following works, Fellini moved into the artifice of spectacle, the fantasies of memory, which became more insular and repetitive as he proceeded" (87). More telling than critique is neglect. In the 600-plus pages of *Movies and Methods I*, Fellini receives one paragraph of discussion. His name does not appear once in *Movies and Methods II* nor (as far as I can tell) in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*.¹ These three anthologies delineate with great accuracy the critical and theoretical terrain of film studies for the past two decades.

Just as Fellini's international recognition corresponded with the rise of *auteurism* and the European art film movement, his decline has paralleled theirs. The sixties was marked by the structuralist and poststructuralist de-centering of the subject, the politicization of film theory and practice following May 1968, and an assault on the high art/mass culture hierarchy of modernism. By the early seventies, as the result of *auteur*-structuralism (Nowell-Smith, Eckert, Wollen) and post-*auteurism* (*Cahiers du cinéma*, Heath) the *auteur* was killed off as creative artist and resurrected as merely one system of codes among many or as the radically dispersed effect of ideological gaps and contradictions. Dead along the way was the European art cinema of the "great directors."

This is hardly to say that Fellini has been ignored only because the *auteurism* of the fifties and sixties has dissolved. Some directors, such as Hitchcock and Ford, have been reappropriated by post-*auteurism* because of the psychoanalytic and ideological richness of their work. Others, such as Ozu and Oshima, have been privileged because of their non-Western signifying practices. And, ironically, Godard has acquired greater *auteur* status than ever because his politics have been so consistent with those of anti- and post-*auteurism*. Fellini's decline

has occurred largely because, in a post-modernist, post-romantic, and post-*auteur* climate, he is seen as the embodiment of the purely reactionary. As Kolker puts it:

Fellini slipped back to a melodramatic mode . . . an autobiographical expression . . . with history relegated to a backdrop and nostalgia elevated above analysis. He returns to a romanticism that insists that the productions of the artist's life and imagination must be of interest simply because they are the productions of the artist. . . . [T]he neo-realist urge to reveal and question has disappeared beneath an irrelevant . . . subjectivity. (87-89)

For Noël Carroll: "Fellini's reflexivity only subserves the propagation of his world view. . . . Indeed, one suspects that Fellini's intrusiveness in [*The Clowns* and *Roma*] . . . enables him to get away with his shameless exploitation of shopworn, universalist (clown as man; city as life) imagery" (105).

These critiques are surprisingly subject-centered—attacking Fellini for, among other things, autobiography, nostalgia, subjectivity, world view, and insidious motive. Focusing on the reviled *auteur*, they say little about the films themselves. In conjunction with the widespread neglect of Fellini's work, they reflect a failure to acknowledge that, just as Fellini's early films formed part of the discourse of a prestructuralist era, his more recent films are part of poststructuralist discourse. In fact, from *8 1/2* on, Fellini's films have lent themselves to sustained critiques of romantic individualism and to a thorough-going revaluation of subjectivity. His "autobiographical" films, moreover, have posited Fellini himself as subject only to dissolve him into other texts, subject positions, and intersecting discourses. Nowhere is Fellini the *auteur* more dead than in his own work.

Fellini's earliest films focus principally on the exploits of well defined main characters—whether comic (Checco in *Variety Lights* [1950], Ivan and Wand in *The White Sheik* [1952]), tragic (Zampanò in *La Strada* [1954], Augusto in *Il Bidone* [1955]), or somewhere in between (Moraldo in *I Vitelloni* [1953], Marcello in *La Dolce Vita* [1959]). Fellini's emphasis on character is consistent with his oft-expressed concern with individuality—especially in

contrast to what he sees as the collectivity of conventional existence.

Self-acceptance can occur only when you've grasped one fundamental fact of life: that the only thing which exists is yourself, your true individual self in depth, which wants to grow spontaneously, but which is fettered by inoperative lies, myths and fantasies proposing an unattainable morality or sanctity or perfection. . . . (Fellini, *Playboy* 60)

Individuality attains its fullest expression in the early films with *The Nights of Cabiria* (1956). Cabiria's film-long struggle for "self-acceptance" culminates with an extreme close-up which individuates her from all else in her world and appears to offer striking testimony to Fellini's conviction that "every human being has [her] own irrevocable truth, which is authentic and precious and unique . . ." (Fellini, *Playboy* 63).²

While Fellini's early films are decidedly individualist in emphasis, his comments about individualism are most intense not during the early period but during the making of *8 1/2* and *Juliet of the Spirits* (1965).³ This creates an interesting paradox because it is precisely with *8 1/2* that I feel we can detect a radical change in the nature of characterization in Fellini's films—a process I might term "postindividualization." This process characterizes all Fellini's work from *8 1/2* through *Roma* (1972) but can best be examined in light of the death of the author/subject in more recent Fellini films: *Amarcord* (1974) through *Intervista* (1987).

Through reproductive technology postmodernist art dispenses with the aura. The fiction of the creating subject gives way to the frank confiscation, quotation, excerptation, accumulation and repetition of already existing images. Notions of originality, authenticity and presence . . . are undermined.

—DOUGLAS CRIMP (53)

In contrast to nearly all Fellini's preceding films, *Amarcord* has only an intermittent main character, Titta, who does not serve as a center of consciousness. He is absent from several episodes, some of them quite lengthy. He narrates only one—and that for only a moment. And he is supplemented, by several narrators who vary radically in articulateness, storytelling motivation, and credibility. There is, in short, no unified voice, and despite the fact that "amarcord" means "I remember,"⁴ there is no I who remembers.

Fellini's Casanova (1976) may seem to offer such an "I": Casanova is both protagonist and presumed author of his tale. However, his function as narrator is intermittent to the point of virtual irrelevance, he is portrayed as a posturer and sycophant rather than a creative artist, and the world he inhabits is one of blatant simulation rather than originality.

Both *Amarcord* and *Fellini's Casanova*, though in different ways, fulfil Linda Hutcheon's description of point of view in postmodern fiction: "Narrators in fiction become either disconcertingly multiple and hard to locate . . . or resolutely provisional and limited—often undermining their own seeming omniscience" (11).

The Orchestra Rehearsal (1979) lacks even *Casanova's* simulation of individuality, as the orchestra becomes a dominant metaphor for collectivity. Not only is there no main character, *all* the characters end up defined entirely in terms of their musical instruments and, even more restrictively, in terms of a piece of music composed by an absent ("dead") author. The conductor, who assumes the role of author-ity by film's end, is no less constructed and determined in his actions than anyone else. He is there because every orchestra needs its leader.

Amarcord

Orchestra Rehearsal



City of Women (1980), like *Fellini's Casanova*, initially seems to offer authorizing human agency: Snaporaz as main character, and even more important Marcello as dreamer of the dream. However, in a crucial reversal, Marcello is established not as source of the dream but as its product. We begin *in medium somnium*, and Marcello only exists as a waking individual (briefly) at the very end. (In fact there is an implicit distinction drawn between "Snaporaz," the character in the dream, and "Marcello"—the "real" character—to whom Snaporaz, in effect, gives birth.) Moreover, the dream, like the orchestra, is a determining device, fixing Snaporaz/Marcello within the mechanism of the unconscious, fuelled by culturally generated projections and distortions of "Women." The culminating symbol of the feminine within the dream—an absurd Madonna/Soubrette balloon, complete with a womblike basket into which Snaporaz crawls—is a grotesque conflation of cultural symbology which violently undermines any notion of integral imagination on the part of its fabricator. (The film's title further underscores the fact that the women represented in the dream are not the unique creation of a free imagination. They are "always already citified"—manmade, socially constructed.)

And the Ship Sails On (1984) recalls *The Orchestra Rehearsal* in its use of a musical community—this time operatic—to construct individuals in roles. (The ship's hierarchy also serves as a determining social structure.) As in *The Orchestra Rehearsal*, characters are determined by dead author-ity—in this case Edmea Tetua, whose death they are mourning with varying degrees of fervor. Moreover, the authority and identity of Tetua (her ashes) exist only to be *scattered* (the goal of the opera troupe's sea voyage). Authority is further undermined within the film's narrative structure by the arbitrary, sporadic, and quite absurd role of the film's narrator/journalist, Orlando. He himself is



City of Women: Marcello as dream's product.

"scattered" or fragmented, becoming most important as *narrator* when he loses all capacity to *report*. (His narrative voice dominates the last few minutes of the film but only in the form of pure speculation, as he is forced to compensate with mere hypotheses for his absence from all the final crucial events aboard the ship.) The split within Orlando highlights the interplay between fiction and history throughout *And the Ship Sails On*, as the film blatantly fictionalizes the sinking of the Lusitania and the outbreak of World War I. This interplay undercuts the authority of artist (Fellini) as well as historian (journalist/narrator), for the fictionality of the film cannot escape the discourse of history, and the historically "real" cannot escape the discourse of fiction. Put another way, the film's fictionality reflects the journalist's "pure speculation" at the end: both are conditioned by actual events, without deriving any authority from them. In addition, there is no position outside the ceaseless play and mutual determination of fact and fiction from which a text, artist, or commentator can be author-ized.

Ginger and Fred (1986)—both the title and the film—promise then withhold individuality. While the title offers us two personal names which imply differentiated figures, those figures are named after other figures who themselves adopted stage names.⁵ Moreover, Ginger and Fred have been virtually reinvented by television to come to Rome and imitate their past imitations of Astaire and Rogers. The world of *Ginger and Fred* is one of endless replication, of copies without originals, in which "lookalikes" become the stars of the day. Within



this context, even Marcello Mastroianni and Giulietta Masina become “lookalikes”—allusions to their prior roles in Fellini films. The remark which a woman presumably addresses to Fellini at the beginning of *City of Women* would, with the addition of Giulietta’s name, well apply here: “Marcello yet again? Please maestro.”

“Fellini yet again?” could be the epigraph for *Intervista*, as Fellini functions not as a “real person” or even an “auteur” so much as a reproduction. He appears as the recycled product of his own films of forty years, of “memories” which exist only as cinematic representations, of the history of cinema, of the music of Nino Rota, of Cinécittà. Living in a world of reproduction, Fellini can be replaced as director. Mastroianni, dressed as Mandrake the Magician, “creates” the Trevi fountain scene in *La Dolce Vita*, making it appear on a makeshift screen in Anita Ekberg’s house. As this sequence suggests, Fellini’s relationship to his recreated memories and (other) staged fantasies is hardly simple or consistent. Not only is he not always positioned as their author, but often (as with Marcello and his dream in *City of Women*) he appears generated out of them. Despite the seeming centrality of Fellini, his subjectivity is, for the most part, a series of momentary configurations forming and dissolving across a grid of cinematic quotations from Fellini’s and Cinécittà’s cinematic history.⁶

Turning to *8 1/2*, we initially seem to have a story of individuation along the lines of *The Nights of Cabiria*.⁷ The film begins with Guido’s literal and figurative awakening and with his acquisition of identity: his body and face gradually emerge from beneath bedclothes and robe, and he moves to the bathroom to discover himself in the mirror. Much of the remainder of the film traces the expansion of Guido’s identity, awareness, control, and inventiveness as he moves from dreams (unconscious hence uncontrolled by Guido as conscious subject) to memories (conscious but merely recollective) to visions (conscious and creative). He also becomes more responsible, more accountable to himself and to others. The final scene, in which his lifetime companions join him in the circus arena, can be seen as a moment of integration.

However, *8 1/2* centers Guido only in order to disperse him. The more aware Guido becomes,

the more he must face his own confusion and instability. Moreover, though he appears to develop the capacity to create his own reality—as in the harem sequence and the screen tests—his visions turn against him, revealing that his desire to control reality is a fundamental limitation. He is, in fact, stripped of his authorship. By the end of the harem sequence, he is positioned as spectator not creator, and he is severely troubled by the image and voice of Luisa which comprise the spectacle. At the screen tests he is confronted by his directorial follies, reduced again to a spectator, and helpless to make any decisions about his film.

Not only does Guido acquire a certain measure of authority only to lose it, he undergoes a multiplication of identities that radically de-centers him. At the screen tests there are at least four Guidos: the director who created the test footage, the director-actor whom we see on screen, and the spectator who himself is divided in two: the “ideal” Guido who whispers “I love you” to Luisa, and the “real” Guido who “lies with every breath” (the words of an actress playing Luisa onscreen, which appropriately describe Guido-as-unfaithful-husband).

The de-authorization and splitting of Guido leads to a crucial loss of subjectivity in the press conference vision that follows upon the screen tests. He has just renounced his film to Claudia Cardinale when the vision suddenly erupts. It is not, however, attributed to Guido. In fact, the point-of-view coding (close-up of Guido, memory or fantasy, return to Guido) which has characterized earlier imaginative sequences is pointedly sabotaged. The vision is preceded with a close-up not of Guido but of Cardinale (first in darkness, then suddenly illuminated by the headlights of a car). This not only eliminates Guido as source, it eliminates subjective origin altogether by offering the impossible: Claudia as author. The film then cuts to a relatively long shot of Guido (with Claudia), turning and shielding himself with his hat. Guido is presented only as the target, not as the creator, of this eruption. And, of course, the lengthy vision does not conclude with any (re)establishing close-up of Guido.

Guido does not just passively suffer loss of author-ity and subject-hood. In renouncing his film, he begins contributing actively to the process. He effectively kills off his film’s “hero” who has become a surrogate self. (His hero in effect fails

him, creating a complex mirroring effect: Fellini has trouble making a film about a character who has trouble making a film about a character who cannot sustain the role of hero.)⁸ Then, at the press conference, Guido kills himself off more directly (though still symbolically): climbing under a table, putting a gun to his head, and pulling the trigger. Then, in the final vision/sequence, he dies by immersion or absorption. In so doing, he recapitulates the loss of subjectivity that is so crucial to the film as a whole. Though Guido is placed at the origin of the final vision through a medium close-up, he quickly moves from subject to object as he enters the circus ring and becomes a character (“the director”). He then surrenders his role as director, joining Luisa and the circle of lifetime companions in a dance of death as well as reunion. Finally, he disappears—as does the child-in-white (another surrogate Guido) who briefly replaces him in the circus arena. By the end of this vision—which is also the end of the film—there is no Guido for the camera to return to. In fact, there is no subjective source of anything.

This reading is strongly at odds with prevailing critical opinion of subjectivity in *8 1/2*. In *Reflexivity in Film and Literature* Robert Stam maintains: “The most striking feature of *8 1/2* . . . is the absolute centrality of Guido. . . . There is virtually no sequence . . . which Guido does not dominate” (104). And, in *Point of View in the Cinema*, Edward Branigan insists that “Fellini’s *8 1/2* . . . despite a startling, even virtuoso mixture of fantasy and reality, remains committed to the assumptions of traditional subjective narration” because it “finds its center in a single character or, more exactly, the consciousness of a character” (143, 144). While Stam’s discussion of *8 1/2* is brief, Branigan’s is carefully argued and merits a response.

Branigan bases much of his reading on scenes early in the film when Guido is, indeed, developing consciousness and point of view (146–47, 151–52). He chooses as his quintessential example of *8 1/2*’s “activity of narration” a moment that occurs less than half way through the film (163–64). In overdetermining the early scenes, Branigan fails to account for narrative progression—especially Guido’s loss of authority towards the film’s end. For this reason, he merely dismisses the increasing fragmentation and multiplication of identities: “It is impor-



8 1/2

tant . . . not to overstate the plurality achieved in *8 1/2*” (152). Moreover, he fails to note the rupture of point-of-view coding in the press conference sequence—a fact which is quite surprising given his scrupulous attention to such coding when Guido fantasizes the hanging of Daumier a few minutes earlier in the film.

Branigan also fails to attend to the construction and dissolution of subjectivity in the final sequence. In fact, he abandons his close reading of cinematic technique altogether. Instead, he posits an elaborate “semantic square” to argue that *8 1/2* ends in a “positive transcendence” which “presents Art as the ultimate mediation between reality and fantasy” and a “resolution on a ‘higher’ plane of reality.” Art “is offered as that term which is not limited by time, history or social condition. Through Art the text asserts its immortality.” Through this transcendence “the confusion of reality is reconciled with the private meaning of Guido’s fantasies. . . . Thus the film becomes, crucially, a working out of the precise status of the author with respect to reality, imagination, text, subject (consciousness), and the other terms” (161).⁹

Branigan’s discussion is not only mystifying (especially in terms of his earlier treatment of the film), it entails a telling contradiction. Given his own insistence that Art becomes the encompassing term under which all else is subsumed, Branigan cannot logically claim that the film is equally “a working out of the precise status of the author” Capital A Art and an individual artist are two quite different things, with the latter clearly

subordinate to the former. What Branigan appears to be doing is seeking a term (Art) which enables him to resurrect the artist (Guido) despite the artist's obvious demise. Branigan's strategy actually confirms the fact that, by the end, Guido (the subject/author) is gone—and something (or perhaps nothing) else has taken his place.

Finally, in failing to trace the crucial shifts that occur in the final sequences of the film, Branigan remains tied to the assumption of a stable ground for Guido's subjectivity:

the text never stops making sense with respect to a 'reality.' We know, for instance, that Guido is having trouble with his wife, that he has a mistress, that he is attempting to make a film, and so forth. The origin of the unreal is always located in Guido and referenced to a privileged, non-subjective level of narration which is, exactly, *reality* for the text. . . . (52)

This assumption refuses to acknowledge, among other things, that Guido's mistress never appears as a "real" person once the harem sequence begins (45 minutes before the film concludes), the real Luisa never reappears after telling Guido to go to hell at the screen tests, and the film is abandoned. Also ignored is the fact that the press conference and the concluding sequence function precisely to strip away both the "privileged . . . *reality*" Branigan insists upon and any equally privileged subjectivity which both grounds and is grounded by such reality. In short, though Branigan does an excellent job detailing the individuating and grounding aspects of *8 1/2*, he is unable to account for its post-individuating aspects.

In terms of jettisoning the individual, Fellini's next film, *Juliet of the Spirits*, is both an advance and a retreat. On the one hand, Juliet is fragmented into far more pieces than Guido. As the film's title suggests, she is a product of the many (all her spirits) rather than the one. Her subjectivity is, in short, fundamentally decentered. However, as in *The Nights of Cabiria*, the thrust of the film is to integrate the many into the one. (This is reflected in Fellini's claim that Juliet is forced "to find herself, to seek her free identity as an individual. And this gives her the insight to realize that all the fears—the phantoms that lived around her—were monsters of her own creation, bred of misshapen education and misread religion"—Fellini, *Playboy* 62).

It is a relatively simple task to deconstruct this attempted reintegration. First of all, Juliet's "oneness" could never exist without her multiplicity—a fact suggested even at film's end when her spirits assert their ever presence.¹⁰ Second, she has become one or "self-identical" through a series of negations—rejecting (among other things) Bhisma, Suzy, Jose, the Godson, the image of her mother, and in fact her tormenting spirits. Based on a series of denials, her identity of self-presence is thus constructed out of absences, non-identities. Third, Juliet exists only because she is seen, and in effect made visible, by her principal "spirits": the camera eye, and, by extension, us-the-audience. (We and the camera waft in through the trees, spirit-like, at the beginning of the film, and she looks us directly in the eye, acknowledging our presence as "spirits," at the end.) Finally, the Juliet who walks off into the forest at the end is "contaminated" by cultural significations. She is, among other things, a princess in a fairy tale and a virgin/child. Her "individuality" is hardly indivisible. It is multiply intersected by socially produced and determined meanings.

However, while the subject can be deconstructed, we must do the work—in effect against the will of the film. For that reason, *Juliet of the Spirits* functions more as an anomaly at this point in Fellini's career—and as a throw-back to earlier films.

Fellini's next film, "Toby Dammit" (1968)¹¹ takes an issue, death, that was principally subtextual and metaphoric in *8 1/2* and makes it the (missing) center of its story. (Fellini had suffered a serious illness prior to the making of the film and had also been involved in an unsuccessful project—"The Voyage of G. Mastorna"—which focused on death.) In fact "Toby Dammit" is a film par excellence of the "dead subject" and dead author. Toby's past-tense voice-over at the beginning, plus his "death" at the end, make clear that he speaks from beyond the grave. That makes his signature at the beginning, written against the sky, the signature of a ghost or missing person. Identity becomes merely the citing/site-ing/sighting of its absence.¹²

More concretely, the film makes clear that Toby must renounce identity and subjectivity, since both are entirely constituted by society. As an actor (the film's most pervasive metaphor), Toby is "identified" only in roles created by other people—

and only by speaking other people's words.

Toby's existence solely as a culturally inscribed actor is implicit in the fact that he originates in fiction—a short story by Edgar Allan Poe (“Never Bet the Devil Your Head”). It is reinforced by his resemblance—sartorial and facial—to Poe himself. (Fellini deliberately had Terence Stamp made up to look like Poe.) It is exemplified in his impersonation of Macbeth—not only reciting Macbeth's lines but losing his head. It is present even in the fact that his name is not personal but metaphoric, naming not an individual but a set of culturally coded meanings. Finally, it pervades Toby's very psychology: socially constructed oppositions (dark vs. light, salvation vs. damnation, head vs. body, private vs. professional) in which the most “personal” of Toby's weapons—the Devil—is, though tailored to Toby's bizarre tastes, a consummate cultural cliché.

Toby's paradoxical fate—to be by not being— informs his end and that of the film. Driving his Ferrari, Toby makes an impossible leap across an abyss—but we hear and see no crash. There is no corpse. Instead, there are metonymic substitutes for his death: a bloody rope (quite dissociated from the scene of the supposed accident), a waxen replica of his head. Toby, in short, dies and does *not* die, a fact underscored by his beyond-the-grave narration. Indeed Toby remains, but now only as the film that bears his name. He is gone as subject and as author. With this final displacement, identity is again undermined as anything individual, indivisible, and unique. It is dispersed throughout a text that is consummately reproducible—via new prints, new screenings, re-viewings, etc. Moreover, as a text within a photographic medium, it is properly reproducible only through its negative. Medium, character, and story all come together to assert identity and selfhood only under erasure.

The erasure of character/actor/subject recurs in *Fellini-Satyricon* (1969), partly as a result of Fellini's continued emphasis on gaps and absences: “I reread Petronius and was fascinated by an element I had not noticed before: the missing parts; that is, the blanks between one episode and the next. . . . that business of fragments really fascinated me” (Grazzini 171–72).¹³ The effacement of the subject recurs also as the result of Fellini's repudiation of character and acting in *Fellini: A Director's Notebook* (1968), a short film made between “Toby

Dammit” and *Fellini-Satyricon*. The motivating force of *Director's Notebook* is the evasiveness, the nonmaterialization, of a hero or main character. The film begins with Fellini discussing his abandonment of a project, “The Voyage of G. Mastorna,” because Mastorna “has not arrived yet.”¹⁴ This in turn leads to an examination of the inadequacy of Marcello Mastroianni, and to some extent Giulietta Masina, as stimuli to Fellini, because of their history as well-defined actor/characters within Fellini's films (see Foreman, “Poor Player”; Prats and Pieters). Acting itself is clearly critiqued in the appearance of Caterina Baratto and her dreadful attempts to portray a bloodthirsty Roman matron. The problem of character/acting then leads Fellini to a new strategy, a new kind of film-making, important not only for *Director's Notebook* but for all his films through *Amarcord*: he seeks out unprofessional actors with intriguing and appropriate faces in place of the familiar personae and skills of trained actors. He chooses, in short, a cinema of image or surface over one of character and depth. This leads directly to *Fellini-Satyricon*, not only with its cast of unknowns, but with its use of the fresco as its principal visual “unit.”

(Fellini's search for unique and fresh faces is, of course, at odds with the self-reflexive use and re-use of Mastroianni, Masina, Ekberg, and himself in his most recent films. The former suggests a lingering romantic/modernist quest for novelty and originality as the wellsprings of inspiration—hence a lingering faith in the integrity of artistic creation. The latter reflects a postmodernist acknowledgement of repetition, reproduction, citation—the “always already”—as the inescapable condition of de/creation. Thus Fellini's rejection of actor/character/predefined subject contributes to the erasure of unified subjectivity while at the same time remaining invested in it.)

Fellini's new conception of casting and (de)characterization is immediately reflected in *Satyricon's* Encolpio. In my experience, most people who have seen *Fellini-Satyricon* for the first time have remained unaware that the film has a protagonist of any sort. Encolpio is hardly a central character in the way that Guido, Juliet, and Toby were. Like the cracked frescoes and broken statues that litter *Satyricon's* landscape, Encolpio is a fragment, relating to other events and characters, as well as the



Fellini *Satyricon*: Encolpio is in short dark tunic.

audience, only at the jagged edge of (dis)connection. The narrative itself is a series of fragments (dis)joined at *their* rough edges—narrative, in short, in absentia: “the potsherds, crumbs, and dust of a vanished world” (Fellini, *Satyricon* 46). Encolpio’s capacity to narrate (and even articulate) comes and goes, reflecting the fracturing of individual intelligence. He even disappears at times, remaining absent from crucial events such as the suicide of the patricians.

Encolpio, like Toby, is a fictional reproduction (originating in Petronius as Toby originated in Poe). In reproducing him, Fellini jettisons his conventional underpinnings of character: depth or “growth” psychology, Christian symbolism, humanist ethics and values, and the teleology of motive and goal. Far more than Toby, Encolpio is pure fictional cipher, adrift in a flow of arbitrary narrative which itself is adrift in the arbitrary flow of historical, political, and social change.

At film’s end, though Encolpio seems momentarily to emerge as a unifying voice, he is confirmed and preserved in a state of fragmentation. He begins to narrate his itinerary upon setting sail, only to have his words broken off in mid-sentence. His image turns into a cracked fresco which itself is separated by cracks from other figures on the same fresco. Then, as the camera draws back, the fresco is revealed to be only one fragment among several. The solid wall which opened the film has been fissured and, with it, unity and wholeness on every

level—from the narrative to the historical to the individual.

The Clowns (1970) seems initially to reinstate character and subjectivity with a vengeance by situating Fellini himself as first-person narrator and protagonist. Yet, like *8 1/2* and “Toby Dammit” (and unlike *Director’s Notebook*, to which it is partially indebted) *The Clowns* ends up being far more about the death of the author/subject than about his(her) predominance. In killing Fellini off as auteur, *The Clowns* radically repositions Fellini in relation to his work—putting him at least in quotation marks and at most under erasure.

The Clowns reinstitutes a kind of autobiographical problematic that marks much of Fellini’s earlier work. Though films such as *I Vitelloni*, *La Dolce Vita*, *8 1/2*, and *Amarcord* are superficially autobiographical, they open broad gaps between Fellini and his past. *I Vitelloni* is set in a town reminiscent of Fellini’s own Rimini and features one character, Moraldo, who gets out at the end. However, the differences between the world of the film and Fellini’s past are far greater than the similarities. The *vitelloni* are products of a specific economic and cultural moment (postwar provincial Italy of the 1950s) which has little in common with Fellini’s youth. More important, Moraldo, as his name suggests, represents the morality or mores of the provinces—something with which Fellini himself would hardly identify.¹⁵ And his alienated escape at the end has little in common with Fellini’s move from the provinces to Rome. (See Alpert 30ff.) Marcello of *La Dolce Vita* is, like Fellini, a provincial who made it to the city—hence Moraldo’s presumed fictional heir. He is, however, a jaded yellow journalist who is even further distanced from Fellini than was Moraldo. He mirrors the latter both in paralyzed detachment and ultimate disillusionment, and his story represents an exhaustive study in character fragmentation. In short, he proves highly unsuitable for any kind of Fellinian working through of genuinely autobiographical issues.¹⁶

8 1/2 and *Amarcord* seem initially to be much more promising in terms of autobiography, the former because of its protagonist, the latter because of its historical setting. However, the effacement of the Fellini surrogate in the first and the pointed absence of one in the second eliminate the grounding upon which genuine autobiography depends.

Such grounding is not lacking in two strongly autobiographical Fellini scripts that have recently been published: "Moraldo in the City" and "Journey with Anita" (Stubbs; Alpert 36-40, 118-21). However, the fact that Fellini never realized these projects seems to confirm an unwillingness or incapacity on his part to use autobiography in anything other than distancing and deconstructive ways. This conjoining of autobiography and (self)-deconstruction is precisely the kind of autobiographical problematic that informs *The Clowns*.

The opening segment introduces character and subjectivity as far more the product than the producer of experience. Fellini as a child enters a circus arena and is, in effect, refashioned—turned into a clown. (The film's title clearly includes Fellini, along with everyone else in the movie.) More specifically, Fellini-the-child's initial fear of clowns, especially the rowdy "Augustes," turns him into a "White Clown" (the authoritarian figure in the White Clown-Auguste relationship), who seeks to contemplate, understand, hence control his circus experience (Burke, "Clowns"). It is Fellini-the-White Clown who, as an adult, seeks to document the clown.

The subject is not only constructed (rather than pristine, autonomous) in *The Clowns*, it is culturally coded—since what refashions the young Fellini is an art form with a long tradition and a well-defined logic or ideational apparatus (i.e., the White Clown-Auguste dialectic). This emphasis on the precoded confirms a shift in Fellini's films from "original" stories to the reproduction of other stories, other art (Poe/Shakespeare in "Toby Dammit," Petronius in *Fellini-Satyricon*, now the art of the clown). Fellini's increasing acknowledgement of reproduction (vs. creation) becomes, in turn, the basis (as I have already suggested) for his deconstruction of subjectivity and authority in his most recent work.

The problem of author/subject in *The Clowns* is defined principally in terms of Fellini's attempts to make a documentary—i.e., to appropriate (as unified and autonomous subject) the clowns (as object and "other"). However, Fellini is no more successful in imposing his directorial will than was Guido. The documentary fails, and a different kind of filmic process takes its place. Even moreso than with Guido, creative experience happens to and

around Fellini rather than originating within him. And just as Fellini-the-child was constructed by the clown/circus discourse (rather than vice versa), Fellini the adult becomes constructed within fictional/narrative discourse rather than standing outside it (Burke, "Clowns"; Prats).

Like 8 1/2, *The Clowns* concludes with a series of authorial deaths and effacements. First of all, Fellini must abandon his role as documentary filmmaker—his principal role in the film. Then, as he directs a different kind of film (an extravagant "resurrection" of the clown Fischietto), he gets a bucket over his head. Moreover, the resurrection attempt is mechanical and labored—and is followed by a hollow sense of anticlimax. Most important, Fellini, like Guido, ultimately disappears. In the final moments, an old clown (Fumigalli) assumes Fellini's narrative authority, resurrects the clown much more successfully, and brings *The Clowns* to a close.

Storytelling in *The Clowns* thus ends up occurring through erasure and substitution, making narrative fortuitous and fragmentary. At the same time, the grand controlling author is eliminated—not just in the surrogate guise of a Guido—but in the person of Fellini, the "grand romantic artist," himself.

Though *The Clowns* ultimately does in the author-as-subject, Fellini's presence as director is dominant until the very last moments. Also, through voiceover, Fellini-as-adult is made clearly continuous with Fellini-as-child in terms not only of identity but motivation. (Fellini-the-adult's desire to document clowns is clearly rooted in Fellini-the-child's experiences.) In this sense, characterization in *The Clowns* is more stable than in "Toby Dammit" or *Satyricon*. *Roma*, on the other hand, consistently undermines continuity and stability. In its original conception, *Roma* had virtually no voiceover: the screenplay includes only one brief instance of Fellini addressing the viewer (Fellini, *Roma* 272), and a theatrical print I saw in Rome (spring 1983) was true to the screenplay. (Some narration appears to have been added to prints shown on Italian television circa 1983.) Furthermore, neither the screenplay nor the Italian-language versions I have seen make any positive identification as Fellini of either the child at the beginning or the young adult in Rome of the 1930s. No narrative voice or charac-

ter ever designates the child or the young adult as Fellini. (The screenplay is insistent on referring to the young adult only as “il ragazzo”—the boy or young man—even when it would be much simpler for purposes of both simple reference and clarity to refer to him as young Fellini.)

Even in the English-language version, which contains voice-over material requested by United Artists,¹⁷ *Roma* cannot help but undermine the consistency of Fellini's presence. The narrative voice is not Fellini's. There is still no designation of the child or young adult as Fellini. (The closest we get is the narrator's statement, following the young adult's first day in Rome: “Thirty years or more have passed since that fabulous evening”—which still keeps the connection oblique.) Both child and young adult are missing from many scenes which, in a conventional flashback-narrative, would have been justified narratively only by their presence or point of view. (*Roma* again differs sharply from *The Clowns*.) And the young adult is played by a Spanish-American actor (Peter Gonzalez) whose origins, native tongue, look, and American mannerisms enhance the distance between Fellini as an adult and any possible earlier manifestation. (Incidentally, the circumstances of this figure's arrival in Rome are markedly different from Fellini's own —Alpert, 29ff.)

In short, though we may be inclined to assume a link between contemporary and younger Fellinis, the film itself refuses to forge one. Fellini refuses to materialize as a coherent and continuous persona, and as a result, “he” is at best an inference, scattered among a number of subject positions.

In addition, even the Fellini of the 1970s is barely in evidence. There is no establishing scene to define his documentary motives and purpose, as there was in *The Clowns*. After Fellini is shown directing the film crew's entry into Rome (a sequence which, tellingly, ends in chaos), he is absent for most of the film's remaining sequences. Even when he reappears at the Festa di Noantri, he is barely noticeable among the crowds, and Gore Vidal's interview is initiated not by Fellini but by one of his crew. The only time he becomes insistent in this final scene (with Anna Magnani), he is dismissed (“Go to sleep. . . . I don't trust you. . . . Good night.”)

As in *The Clowns*, documentary film-making, as a centering, author-ized, project fails; even the

documentary camera is stolen. And, again, Fellini is effaced at the end. Once Magnani dismisses him, a gang of motorcyclists rides into the frame, Fellini vanishes, and the cyclists bring the film to a close.

Even more than in *The Clowns*, Fellini exists as someone constructed entirely within cultural coding. For one thing, there is no Fellini figure who initially stands outside the “arena” of cultural conditioning (the child in *The Clowns* watched the erection of the circus tent from his window the night before he entered it). From the outset, Fellini is entirely positioned within and produced by the multiple discourses that are “Roma.” This is true even if we infer a link between present-day Fellini and the child of the opening sequences, who first appears in uniform, amidst a crowd of students, getting a history lecture on Caesar. It is even truer if we refuse to infer this link—and see Fellini produced well into the narrative by discourse itself.

Unlike “the clowns,” “Roma” does not constitute a highly specific personal experience such as Fellini's childhood encounter with the circus. Rome encompasses history, culture, ethnicity, religion, art, movies, government, geography, and so on ad infinitum. Consequently, individuality and subjectivity are situated at the intersection of an enormous aggregate of discourses.

Equally important, Rome is anything but a centering phenomenon, capable of fixing identity. It is ever-shifting, unencompassable, indefinable. It comes to represent not a place or even site of discourses, but always what is *not there*. (This is true from the opening image of the rock, signifying “elsewhere,” through the closing images of the cyclists, whose exodus again makes Rome “elsewhere.”) Ultimately Rome is the force of change or difference, making history or meaning possible but also riddling it with instability. It is the surge of the present in the subway sequence that obliterates the underground frescoes—but at the same time, creates a tabula rasa on which anything can be painted. Rome is also the inexplicable materialization of the cyclists: impersonal, empowered, irresistible—configuring and dispersing, centering and decentering—origin and destination unknown. Ultimately Rome “names” that which is unnameable, all that escapes identification, hence identity.¹⁸

Roma's deconstruction of the subject/author culminates a process initiated in *8 1/2*. It also points to the films that will follow (*Amarcord* to

Intervista). It takes up a notion implied in “Toby Dammit” and *Fellini-Satyricon*—the self as mere reproduction—and paradoxically “personalizes” it by applying it to Fellini himself. (By applying it to himself rather than merely fictional figures, Fellini of course makes the issue all the more compelling.) Whereas *The Clowns* initially offers the possibility of a narrative “I” in charge of (re)creation and discourse, *Roma*—by completely absenting that “I”—turns Fellini into pure product. Not only is he reproduced by the multiple discourses that are “Roma,” he is entirely a product of cinema. He is always and only the discourse(s) of his film. Unable to stand outside and create the text, he, like Toby, is dispersed through and by it. In an age and medium of mechanical reproduction, Fellini, the “original,” ends up generated by the copy.

The dismantling of the subject, and Fellini himself as subject, does not automatically absolve Fellini’s work from the charges of self-indulgence so often levied against it. To a large extent, his films must center the subject in order to decenter it. Moreover, their self-reflexivity can be seen as an attempt at recuperation of selfhood in the face of its acknowledged demise. Nonetheless, the issue of subjectivity in his work is far more complex than has generally been recognized. Focusing much less on Fellini himself than his severest critics would claim, Fellini’s films not only reflect but help constitute the vibrant contemporary theorization of the subject under erasure.

Notes

1. I am relying on recollection, the index, and a recent check of *Movies and Methods* I and II. *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* lacks an index, so I am relying here on recollection plus a check.
2. For a more detailed analysis of this “narrative of individuation,” see Burke, *Federico Fellini*, especially chapters eight and ten.
I employ qualifying terms such as “apparently” and “seems” in my remarks about *The Nights of Cabiria* because of the convincing poststructuralist critique of such notions as individuation, enlightenment, and self-integration (a critique which, I might add, is missing from my own study of Fellini cited in this note). It is not my goal in this essay to undertake such a critique with regard to *The Nights of Cabiria*, especially since my discussion of Fellini’s later films implicitly does this job.
3. The quotations about individuality are from an interview which focused equally on *8 1/2* and *Juliet of the Spirits*.

Perhaps Fellini’s most frequently quoted statement on the subject was uttered in 1962, the year Fellini was making *8 1/2*: “. . . what I care about most is the freedom of man, the liberation of the individual man from the network of moral and social convention in which he believes, or rather in which he thinks he believes, and which encloses him and limits him. . . .” (Fellini, *Fellini* 157) It is interesting to note the utter lack of emphasis on individuality in Fellini’s 1980s book-length interview (Grazzini).

4. Consistent with his problematizing of the subject in *Amarcord*, Fellini has both maintained that “amarcord” means “I remember” and, on other occasions, denied it.
5. Fred Astaire was born Frederick Austerlitz; Ginger Rogers, Virginia Catherine McMath.
6. Appropriately, there is no author implied in the film’s title: *Intervista* is a noun, not a verb with a subject.
7. For a more extensive discussion of the consolidation and dissolution of Guido’s identity in *8 1/2*, see Burke, “Modes.”

Interestingly, as we examine Fellini’s comments about preparing for this film, we find an immediate problem with the identity of the main character: “I had not yet decided what type of man we would try to portray, what his profession would be: a lawyer? an engineer? a journalist? . . . One day I decided to put my dream hero in a spa But then the plot began to unravel altogether. It didn’t have a central core from which to develop, nor a beginning, nor could I imagine how it might end. Every morning Pinelli asked me what our hero’s profession was. I still didn’t know. . . . I . . . couldn’t manage to find my film again. . . . I admitted that maybe it had never existed.” (Grazzini 160, 161) We might say, then, that Fellini’s attempts to make *8 1/2* mark the search for a missing identity.

8. Christian Metz has, of course, analyzed the mirroring aspects of *8 1/2* in great detail in his well known essay “Mirror Construction in Fellini’s *8 1/2*.”
9. I have somewhat rearranged the order of Branigan’s statements to provide a concise summary of his logic.
10. In English-language prints, Juliet tells her spirits “I don’t need you any more”—an act of dismissal that is *not* part of the original film.
11. For those unfamiliar with this short Fellini work, “Toby Dammit” was part of a film anthology entitled *Spirits of the Dead* (*Tre passi nel delirio* in Italian), released in 1969. All the films were based on short stories by Edgar Allan Poe. The other directors involved were Roger Vadim (“Metzengerstein”) and Louis Malle (“William Wilson”). Though not as well known as other Fellini films from this period, “Toby Dammit” is crucial in highlighting shifts in Fellini’s signifying practice.
12. For a penetrating analysis of “Toby Dammit”—and one quite consistent with the argument in my essay—see Foreman, “Poor Player.”
13. Fellini also talks of making the fragments whole through dream, but as I will try to suggest, the effect of *Fellini Satyricon* is to privilege the fragment, not the whole.
14. Mastorna’s role as inspiration for Fellini throughout the late sixties and seventies is further testimony to the importance of the “missing subject” in Fellini’s work. (“I am certain that without *Mastorna* I would not have imag-

ined *Satyricon* . . . nor *Casanova* nor the *City of Women* . . . Even *And the Ship Sails On* and *The Orchestra Rehearsal* owe a small debt to *Mastorna*"—Grazzini 169).

15. See Burke, *Federico Fellini*, pp. 21–28 for a more detailed analysis of *I Vitelloni* and Moraldo.
16. *La Dolce Vita* initially seems interesting in terms of the dismantling of the subject that occurs in later Fellini films. However, as the final shots of the film make clear, that dismantling takes place in light of a strong romantic yearning for purity and wholeness. Such yearning is strongly diminished even by the making of *8 1/2*.
17. So Fellini informed me in a conversation in Rome in June of 1983.
18. For a fine analysis of *Roma* which makes some of the points made here, see Foreman, "Cinematic City."
19. For much of the factual information that follows, I am indebted to Alpert—less for providing it (nearly all of it pre-exists his biography of Fellini) but for verifying its accuracy, since so much of it initially appeared in interviews.
20. It is also interesting to note that, as the subject begins to dissolve in the film text, it is momentarily recuperated by the credits. The phrase "conceived and directed by Federico Fellini" appears for the first time in the titles to *8 1/2*. The only other time it appears is in *Juliet of the Spirits*, accentuating yet again the ambivalence toward the subject at this stage of Fellini's work.

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